



USAID | MACEDONIA
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 28th, 2012

Press office: +389 2 310 2314

Cell phone: +389 (0)70 367 547

Email: bvelickovska@usaid.gov

Contact at the project: +389 47 220 203

Email: e.stojanovska@bscbitola.org

PRESS RELEASE

International Business Conference in Bitola What We Do for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Today a three-day international conference organized by the USAID Business Without Borders project began. The conference is a unique platform where participants from the public, private, civil-society and academia sectors will exchange regional experiences and elaborate policies for SME development, hence further paving the way for overall economic growth.

"We can all agree that small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of a strong domestic economy, contributing significantly to jobs and income generation," said Deputy Chief of Mission, Brian Aggeler. "Initiatives to increase their growth and competitiveness have been central to the U.S. Government's economic growth assistance in Macedonia and the broader Southeast Europe region for the past two decades."

As part of the conference, students from high schools in Bitola organized a mini SME fair and a skate park as a local initiative for social entrepreneurship. In the next two days, the participants will discuss current issues important to SMEs in Macedonia, and will propose solutions for alleviating the obstacles they face, improving their performances and creating competitive advantages in today's dynamic business environment.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

USAID Business without Borders project is implemented by the Business Start-up Centre (BSC) in Bitola. USAID awarded U.S. \$1.3 million to the BSC for this three-year project that works to accelerate economic growth in southern Macedonia by assisting small and medium enterprises. Since January 2011, the project helped 96 new entrepreneurs to start their businesses and 77 existing businesses to improve their performance. As a result, 318 new jobs have been created, almost half of them occupied by women. The project also trained almost 1,200 participants in business skills and business planning, marketing and sales, how to grow new agricultural crops, or how to provide better catering services.

The American people, through USAID, have invested over \$500 million in Macedonia since 1993. USAID is working with the people of Macedonia to create jobs, strengthen democratic institutions and practices, enhance integrated education, and prepare students for the workforce. These initiatives improve the quality of life and support Macedonia's transition to a stable and prosperous democracy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov> and USAID FB page <http://www.facebook.com/USAIDMacedonia>